

Have You Been Sexually Assaulted?

Information For Survivors of Sexual Assault

Ninth Edition

ARE YOU FEELING:

Ashamed?
Depressed
Anxious?
Angry?
Numb?

REMEMBER:

Nobody has the right to sexually assault you. It is not your fault.

You did not do anything to deserve this. A crime has been committed against you.

**BC WOMEN'S
HOSPITAL+
HEALTH CENTRE**



An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

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Most of the information in this booklet is applicable to all survivors of sexual assault. All persons regardless of age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, self identified gender, and/or non gendered are sexually assaulted.

Sexual assault covers all forms of forced sexual contact. For further information, please see the legal section of this booklet, pages 13-14.

Canadian Cataloguing in Publication Data

Main Entry under title:

Information for the Sexually Assaulted

1. Rape victims—Services for—British Columbia.

1. Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre.

Original Edition prepared by: United Way of the Lower Mainland Social Planning and Research Committee on the Social and Health Aspects of Rape.

Second Edition prepared 1983 by: Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre, Vancouver, BC.

Third Edition prepared 1992 by: Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre, Vancouver, BC.

Fourth Edition prepared 1999 by: Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre, and B.C. Women's Sexual Assault Service, Vancouver, BC.

ISBN 0-9691514-5-4

Fifth Edition prepared 2006 by: Sexual Assault Service, BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre and Women Against Violence Against Women, Vancouver, BC.

Sixth Edition prepared April 2011 by: Sexual Assault Service, BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre and Women Against Violence Against Women, Vancouver, BC.

Seventh Edition prepared March 2012 by: Sexual Assault Service, BC Women's Hospital & Health Centre and Women Against Violence Against Women, Vancouver, BC.

Eighth Edition prepared April 2015 by: Sexual Assault Service, BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre and Women Against Violence Against Women,

Vancouver, BC.

Ninth Edition prepared Jan 2017 by: Sexual Assault Service, BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre and Women Against Violence Against Women, Vancouver, BC.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

What You Can Expect at the Hospital	1
Hospital Procedures for Sexual Assault Survivors	1-2
What You Should Know About the Medical Examination	2-3
Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)	4-5
Pregnancy	5
Patient's Own Record of Medical Procedures	6-8
Your Reactions to Sexual Assault	10
What Can You Do?	11
How to Support Someone Who Has Been Sexually Assaulted	12-13
The Law Relating to Sexual Assault	13-14
Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP)	14
What to Do If A Child Has Been Sexually Abused	15

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT AT THE HOSPITAL

1. To receive full information about your treatment options and the care provided to you;
2. To have the option of having a friend, family member, or support worker present for support throughout your hospital care;
3. To decide if you would like medical care and/or the treatment offered;
4. To receive considerate and respectful care by doctors and nurses;
5. To have the option of a complete medical examination whether or not you decide to have forensic samples collected;
6. To decide if you would like to have forensic samples collected and saved for a later date;
7. To decide if you would like to report the sexual assault to the police;
8. You may be charged a hospital emergency room fee if you do not have valid B.C. Medical coverage. If this happens please speak with the hospital social worker to access supports

HOSPITAL PROCEDURES FOR SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS

Triage:

- If you wish, ask a friend, relative or sexual assault support worker to go to the hospital with you.
- You will be asked to provide basic information (name, address and medical insurance number if you have one) to the person at the Emergency Admitting Area. Depending on the hospital, this person may be a clerk or a nurse. You may want a friend or family member to do this for you.
- A nurse will ask you some questions about your health.
- You may have to wait (hopefully in a private room) before seeing the doctor/nurse examiner. This delay is due to the fact that many hospital emergency rooms are very busy.

- Any interview with hospital personnel or the police (if involved) about the sexual assault should be carried out in a private area.
- After speaking to a nurse and after the options for care are explained, you will be asked to sign a consent for a sexual assault examination, if that's what you want.
- You have the right to delete any portion of the consent form which you do not agree to. This will not affect the quality of care you receive.

You have the right to a complete medical examination whether or not you decide to have forensic samples collected.

- You will be asked if you consent to forensic samples being collected. Forensic samples can consist of things like the documentation of injuries, the collection of swabs, as well as an examination of areas related to the sexual assault.
- With consent, your clothes may be collected as forensic samples. They will not be returned once they are taken by police.
- You may choose whether you would like your regular doctor to be notified of this visit. If you do not want your doctor contacted, please tell the doctor and/or nurse at the hospital.

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE MEDICAL EXAMINATION

- In the examining room you may be asked to undress and put on a hospital gown. You can request to stay in your clothes if you feel more comfortable.
- A support person may be present during any part of your hospital care if you choose.
- If you are having forensic samples taken, your clothes may be collected, placed in paper bags, and kept by police for some time as they are considered evidence. If this is the case, you can:
 - have a friend or sexual assault support worker bring a change of clothing to the hospital for you, or the hospital might provide you with clothes.
- The doctor/nurse examiner will begin the examination by taking a medical history. This ensures that you will receive

complete and proper medical attention. S/he will ask you some questions, including:

- any medication you are taking
 - if you've been immunized against Hepatitis B
 - information about the assault that is relevant for the medical examination
- If you consent, the doctor/nurse examiner can do a physical examination, including:
 - an examination to check for injuries;
 - a genital examination;
 - collection of forensic samples from areas involved in the sexual assault, when appropriate
 - You may decline any portion of the exam and stop the exam at any point. Procedures will be done only with your ongoing consent. If you are unsure about continuing, let the doctors and nurses know this.
 - If you think or suspect alcohol or drugs may have been involved in the sexual assault, you may be asked if you would like blood and urine collected as forensic samples. If you consent to this, and your blood or urine is tested, the result could show any alcohol and drugs recently taken/given. However, the drugs used in sexual assault cases usually leave the body quickly and are hard to detect. A negative test does not mean you were not drugged or sexually assaulted.
 - You will be given treatment for any injuries you have.
 - You will also be offered treatment to prevent STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and pregnancy (if relevant). See pages 4-5 for definitions and explanations.
 - If you are undecided about reporting to the police, some hospitals can take forensic samples and store them for up to one year. If later you decide you want to report the assault to police, the samples will be available.
 - A note can be provided to excuse you from work or school. The note does not refer to the sexual assault

SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS (STIs)

STIs are infections caused by germs usually passed on by sexual contact.

Some types of STIs for which you should be treated are:

Gonorrhea

- Gonorrhea bacteria can grow inside the throat, bladder opening, cervix (womb opening), and anus.
- A swab can be taken from any of these places to test for gonorrhea. However, it may take several days after exposure before gonorrhea can be detected by a test.
- Antibiotics taken at the time of the examination can treat and prevent gonorrhea.

Chlamydia

- Chlamydia occurs in the same places as gonorrhea.
- Tests will not show it for a week or more after contact.
- Antibiotics taken at the time of the examination can treat and prevent chlamydia.

Syphilis

- Syphilis bacteria can grow anywhere sexual contact has occurred.
- The first sign of syphilis may be a painless sore which can be easily overlooked and may not appear for up to 30 days.
- The best way to test for syphilis is to take a blood test one month and three months after the sexual assault. The blood test shows if your body is reacting to syphilis germs.
- Treatment and prevention of syphilis may be covered by antibiotics for gonorrhea and/or chlamydia but testing is recommended at 1 and 3 months after the assault.

Herpes

- Herpes has a 2 to 15 day incubation period.
- You may feel feverish, have headaches, pains in your muscles and general malaise.
- Lesions like cold sores may appear in the genital area.
- Herpes is diagnosed from a swab of these lesions, or from blood tests. There is treatment for herpes symptoms, but you have to initiate treatment within 3 days of developing genital sores.

Hepatitis B

- Hepatitis B is a viral infection that can be transmitted by sexual contact.
- If you have been fully immunized you are likely safe from infection.
- The doctor/nurse will talk with you about whether Hepatitis B vaccination or other treatment would be helpful at this time.

Other STIs

- There are other infections that can be passed on during sexual or close physical contact. For example, HIV is considered to be one of these; however, the chances of contracting HIV from a single exposure are low.
- The doctor/nurse examiner can answer any questions you may have about HIV.

Some of these infections may take several weeks to develop symptoms. Therefore, any unusual genital discharge, odors, irritations or itching should be checked by a doctor/nurse practitioner. You can be examined at a health or STI clinic. If you are under 24 you may be able to access services at a youth clinic as well.

PREGNANCY

There may be a risk of pregnancy in sexual assault.

What can be done?

Emergency Contraception: “Morning-After” Pills or IUD

These are female hormones that have a high success rate of preventing pregnancy if taken no later than 5 days after unprotected sexual intercourse. It is best if these pills are taken as soon as possible after the sexual assault. Currently, the most common emergency contraceptive is **Plan B**.

An IUD (intrauterine device) is recommended to prevent pregnancy in women >75 kgs, or between 5 - 7 days after the sexual assault.

Urine Pregnancy Test

A pregnancy test can be done any time after 10 days from the sexual assault to determine if you are pregnant.

**PATIENT'S OWN
RECORD OF MEDICATIONS
AND RECOMMENDED
FOLLOW UP TESTS**

PATIENT'S OWN RECORD OF MEDICATIONS AND RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP TESTS

Examination Date: _____

Attending Doctor / Nurse Examiner: _____

Our Office Telephone: _____

Treatment of:

Medication Used:

Pregnancy: _____

Gonorrhea: _____

Chlamydia: _____

Hepatitis B: _____

Nausea: _____

Other: _____

Follow-up Resources

Recommended Follow-up Tests:

Gonorrhea and Chlamydia test:

We recommend STI testing after the sexual assault if you have any genital discharge or/and pain. For Women - STI testing is recommended if you have any of the above symptoms or are pregnant or having any vaginal or pelvic pain.

Syphilis (blood) test:

We recommend a Syphilis blood test 1 month and 3 months after the sexual assault.

HIV (blood) test:

We recommend an HIV blood test 1 and 3 months after the sexual assault.

Hepatitis B (blood) test:

We recommend a Hepatitis B blood test 1 and 3 months after the sexual assault.

Pregnancy test:

We recommend women get a urine pregnancy test 10 days to 4 weeks after the sexual assault.

Other:

Hepatitis B Vaccine

- in one month _____

- in six months _____

YOUR REACTIONS TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

- It is common to have a range of emotions and feelings after a traumatic experience. Being sexually assaulted is a traumatic experience.
- Each individual responds to and deals with sexual assault in different ways. You may have feelings of anxiety, self-blame, depression, anger, shame, confusion, denial, sadness, or numbness.
- You may not want to think about what happened at all or you may not be able to think about anything else. Pay attention to all of your feelings, and take care of yourself.
- These feelings can occur singly or all at once. You might express these feelings by being tense, by crying or by talking, or you may try to hide your feelings and appear calm or withdrawn.
- Sexual Assault Survivors may experience all of these feelings. Most survivors have some of them.
- After being sexually assaulted, you may find your lifestyle disrupted. You may wish to move or change jobs, and your social activities may be affected. Some survivors are afraid to be alone, others are afraid to go out or to be in groups.
- If you think you may have been drugged and/or sexually assaulted, you may not know exactly what happened to you. You may have memory loss and not know for sure if you were sexually assaulted. Not knowing what happened can leave you feeling confused, powerless, humiliated, betrayed and afraid.
- You may also have minor health problems due to the stress you are experiencing. Your sleeping habits may change and you may have disturbing dreams. Your appetite may also be affected, resulting in weight loss or weight gain.
- **It is important for you, your family, and friends to understand that all of your feelings are normal, acceptable, and real. These are all common responses to the sexual assault.**

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

You may think you should have been able to foresee or stop the sexual assault. It is important to remind yourself that it was not your fault. No one deserves to be sexually assaulted. You can't always know who or what situations are going to turn out to be dangerous. You made the best choices possible at that time, in that moment.

- You may wish to express your feelings to a trusted friend, a support worker, or a counsellor. Talking may help you to clear up confusing feelings and to sort out ways to move forward with your life. You may wish to talk about your feelings and concerns immediately after being sexually assaulted or you may need to wait and talk about this experience later.
- You have been through a very traumatic experience and you need to take care of yourself. Give yourself time to heal. Try to find activities or places where you feel safe and comfortable
- Explore ways to express your feelings and pay attention to what you are feeling. Writing about your feelings may help if you have trouble talking about them. You can keep this private or share it with someone you trust.
- Your friends and family may be upset and angry. It is not your responsibility to make them feel better. Encourage them to find someone to talk to about their reactions.
- Sometimes memories of the sexual assault do go away and then come up again. This will lessen as time goes on and as you heal. You are a survivor and you are not alone.
- If you were drugged, you may be coping with memory loss. This can be extremely difficult. Sometimes the memories return, other times they do not. Expressing your feelings may still be helpful even if you don't remember what may have happened to you.
- Many people who have been sexually assaulted say that it feels like they have no control over what happens in their lives now. It is important during this time in your life to make decisions and choices you feel comfortable with. You do not have to go through this alone. Please contact a sexual assault counsellor to learn more about counselling options and support services.

Over the last twenty years we have been discovering that many people are victims/survivors of sexual assault. Although being sexually assaulted is a painful and frightening experience, there is hope as many survivors heal from this traumatic crime.

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ASSAULTED

How you can be a support

Your response towards the survivor of sexual assault can greatly influence how they will deal with the trauma. Those close to the survivor may experience many confusing emotions themselves. These feelings may include disbelief, anger or guilt. It is important that you get the understanding and support you need from someone other than the survivor, perhaps a friend or sexual assault counsellor. Respect survivor's confidentiality and right to privacy.

The survivor of sexual assault may feel powerless and fear physical injury or death. These fears may linger or recur in feelings of mistrust. When the shock of what actually happened wears off, confusing feelings may follow. They may feel humiliated, guilty, embarrassed or angry. These are all normal and common emotions for someone who has been sexually assaulted.

As a support person to the survivor, here are a few basics to keep in mind.

- Try and remember a situation where you felt afraid and all alone. This may help you have a better understanding of how the survivor is feeling.
- Try not to be overprotective. It is important for survivors to regain control of their lives.
- Don't ask a lot of probing questions or focus on the sexual aspect of the crime. Sexual assault is an extremely personal, violent and coercive crime.
- Do ask about what concerns they have (i.e. fear for their safety, concerns for their health).

- Communicate your own acceptance by being natural and letting them know you are willing to listen.
- Showing affection is important; it shows you still care. If you have been relating intimately, it may be best to use non-sexual forms of touching and wait until the person indicates they are comfortable with sexual relations.
- It is important not to blame the survivor for the crime committed against them. Sexual assaults are meant to humiliate and degrade the person and are an act of aggression. Whether they fought or cooperated with the attacker, the survivor made the safest choice possible at the time.
- Do continue to live and talk with the survivor the way you always have. Don't try to avoid the subject. Encourage the expression of their feelings, but respect their right to privacy. Providing a caring environment in which they feel free to express their concerns around the assault will help facilitate the healing process.

THE LAW RELATING TO SEXUAL ASSAULT

In 1983 major changes were made to the law related to sexual violence. The words 'rape' and 'indecent assault' were removed and a series of new offences called 'sexual assault' were created.

The offences now cover all forms of unwanted sexual contact, from forced sexual touching to forced intercourse.

If you decide to report the sexual assault to the police, they will take a report from you and conduct an investigation. If you have had forensic samples collected, the police will need them and they will ask for your consent to collect them from where they are stored. The police will pass on the investigation information to Crown Counsel. The Crown Counsel is a lawyer that will prosecute the case on behalf of society. They are not your lawyer. **It is the Crown Counsel who decides if and what charges are to be laid.** If charges are to be laid, Crown Counsel will be appointed to the case, and s/he will prosecute the case in court. You will be called as a witness if the case goes to court. Victim Services can help you prepare to go to court. Please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 to find out about victim services in our area.

Before the case proceeds to court you will be interviewed by the Crown Counsel. You may also be asked to testify as a witness at a Preliminary Hearing and later, at the trial.

If you do not wish to report to police, that is your right. You can always choose to report the sexual assault at a later date. There is no time limit on reporting a sexual assault. Some people decide to file anonymous and unofficial reports called "Third Party Reports." A victim service worker may be able to assist you in doing this and give you further details about third party reporting. If you are interested in third party reporting, please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808 to find a community based victim service program near you.

If you would like more information on these procedures, or would like someone to go with you when you report to police, speak with Crown Counsel, or need to go to court, contact the nearest sexual assault centre or Community-Based Victim Assistance program. To find a program near you, please call VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808.

CRIME VICTIM ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CVAP)

If you have been sexually assaulted you may be able to apply for benefits under the Crime Victim Assistance Program administered by the Ministry of Justice. This program was previously called Criminal Injuries Compensation and was administered under the Workers Compensation Board.

CVAP may cover things such as counselling fees, prescription drug expenses, medical and/or dental expenses, lost earning capacity, and clothing that may have been damaged as a result of the crime.

If you would like more information about this program or to find the nearest victim service program to you, please contact:

VictimLINK at 1-800-563-0808.

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

Be aware that:

1. Children are usually abused by people they know and trust.
2. Often sexual assaults committed against children do not involve an open attack or physical injury. Adults use their position of authority to convince children to give in to their sexual demands, and often tell children to keep it a secret or they (the abuser) will get in trouble.
3. Children very seldom lie about such a serious matter.
4. Not all children are able to tell parents directly that they have been sexually abused. Changes in behaviour, reluctance to be with a certain person or to go to a certain place may be signals that something has happened.

What to do immediately:

1. Go with the child to a place where you can talk without being overheard. Ask the child to tell you what happened in her own words. Listen carefully and remain calm.
2. Tell the child that telling you was the right thing to do, and that you are very sorry this happened.
3. Tell the child that she is not responsible for what happened.
4. The child may need to have a medical examination; however, it is not necessary to treat it as an emergency unless the assault has taken place within the last 48 hours. Contact your regular physician or go to the nearest Hospital Emergency Department.
5. Sexual abuse of children must be reported to the Ministry of Child and Family Development. You can also contact a Sexual Assault Centre for information and referrals. VictimLINK can be reached at 1-800-568-0808.

If there is no sexual assault crisis centre near you, other places you may want to contact are:

- VictimLINK - Toll Free 1-800-563-0808
(24 hour provincial referral line)
- Your local women's centre
- Your local Community-Based Victim Assistance or Stopping the Violence Counselling Program
- Sexual Assault Service
BC Women's Hospital + Health Centre
604-875-2881
- Your local Emergency Department

To order more booklets contact:

Sexual Assault Service
4500 Oak Street
Vancouver, BC
V6H 3N1

Phone: 604-875-2183

Notes:

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